CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL LANDMARKS SERIES

Edited by Vernon Aubrey Neasham

# ANCHORAGE of the SAN CARLOS

Registered Landmark #236

by

Engel Sluiter

for

State of California, Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks

Berkeley, 1937

Written under auspices of Works Progress Administration
District #8, Project #165-03-7307, Symbol #165027

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The San Carlos, first ocean-going vessel to pass through the Golden Gate, dropped anchor within San Francisco Bay, on August 5, 1775, at sundown.[1] The event was a significant one in California history. The discovery of the sea entrance to San Francisco Bay opened that great natural harbor to the commerce of the world.

The story of the San Carlos is interesting. Its history, however, is part and parcel of a larger story, the Spanish occupation of Alta California during the last half of the eighteenth century. Before that time, except for the explorations of Cabrillo and Ferrelo (1542-1543), Francis Drake (1579), Sebastian Vizcaíno (1602-1603), and the various Manila galleon captains, the coast of California and of Northwest America had been unvisited by Europeans.[2] In the late eighteenth century changes began. The North Pacific threatened to become an area of international rivalry. The Russians, expanding eastward across Siberia during the seventeenth century, stood at Kamchatka by 1706, and under Vitus Bering began a maritime expansion in the North Pacific which resulted

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in the discovery of Bering Strait (1728) and the Alaskan Mainland (1741). Then followed the first swarming of the "Outlaw Hunters," for the rich seal and otter skins, to the Aleutian Islands, to be succeeded by the official exploratory voyages under Krenitzin and Levashef in 1766-1769.[3]

At that time the English were approaching, by sea and land, the North Pacific area. Most of their voyages around South America, it is true, were restricted to the South Pacific; but with Canada in their full possession since 1763, the English were advancing by land, also, from Montreal and the shores of Hudson Bay. To secure the rich pelts of beaver, mink, and bear was their object.[4]

To Spain, the vision of what might happen in the North Pacific region was very disturbing. Clearly, the danger was not imminent, but an increasing threat to her exclusive control in the area was, nevertheless, there. Particularly, her rich possession of New Spain would be one of the first to be endangered. In answer, therefore, Spain advanced her own frontier. In 1768, the great visitador-general, José de Galvez, founded the port of San Blas as a base of

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4. Chapman, A history of California, the Spanish Period, 262-268.

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supplies, ordered the construction of two packets, the San Antonio and the San Carlos, and the following year sent northward land and sea expeditions which founded San Diego, the first white settlement in Alta California.[5] From San Diego, Portolá was then sent to find the port of Monterey, but, missing it and continuing northward, his men, on November 1, 1769, sighted the southern arm of San Francisco Bay. With this news they returned to San Diego.[6] The following year, Monterey was re-discovered; a presidio and a mission were founded there, and the place became, for the time, the last Spanish outpost.

Still the Spaniards did not rest easily. The Conde de Lacy, Spanish ambassador to Russia, repeated alarming reports about the plans of Russians and other foreigners in the North Pacific. New exploring expeditions northward along the California coast, to a higher latitude than ever before, and a thorough reconnaissance of San Francisco Bay were ordered by the home government. Bucareli, the viceroy of New Spain, considered the occupation of the bay area indispensable.[7] Thus tardily was opened a new period of Spanish discovery along the western coast of North America, interrupted since the time of Vizcaíno.

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5. Chapman, History of California, the Spanish Period, 216-231.
6. Zoeth Skinner Eldredge, The beginnings of San Francisco, I, 31-35.
7. Chapman, History of California, the Spanish Period, 277.

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5. Chapman, History of California, the Spanish Period, 316-321.
6. Joseph Skinner Tidredge, The beginnings of San Francisco, I, 31-35.
7. Chapman, History of California, the Spanish Period, 277.

In August 1773, the decision had been reached to send six capable naval officers to New Spain to conduct the proposed new explorations from the west coast as a base, but the men did not leave Spain until June of the following year.[8] Bucareli had sent out a trial expedition of one vessel, the Santiago, under the command of Juan Pérez, an old Manila galleon pilot, with orders to sail to 60° north, and to claim for Spain such land as he touched. Late in January, 1774, Pérez sailed from the port of San Blas. He reached Monterey in May, and the following month sailed northwestward, not sighting land again until he had reached 54° on July 19. He did not go much farther north, nor did he land or take possession of any part of the country. He made his return mainly out of sight of land, almost until he was back at Monterey.[9]

Even before Pérez returned to San Blas, the naval officers detailed by the Spanish government had arrived in Mexico City, and Bucareli immediately set about preparing another expedition along the northwest coast. At San Blas all was soon a bustle. The Santiago was again made ready,

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8. Wagner and Baker, "Fray Benito de la Sierra's account of the Hezeta expedition to the northwest coast in 1775," in California Historical Society Quarterly, IX. (1930), 203.
9. Ibid., 204.

to sail under the command of Bruno de Hezeta, who had orders to advance northward 65°. The schooner Sonora was fitted out as a consort to the larger ship and placed under Juan Manuel de Ayala and Juan Francisco Bodega y Cuadra. The packet San Carlos, under Don Miguel Manrique, was prepared to accompany the expedition as far as Monterey, and from there to proceed alone in order to discover the sea entrance to San Francisco Bay and to explore the port itself.[10]

"On March 16, 1775," says Fray Benito de la Sierra in his diary of the voyage, "at five of the afternoon, we left the church of San Blas with the image of Our Lady, Maria Santisima, and reciting the litany advanced in procession to the shore where we embarked." The voyage was hardly under way before an unusual incident occurred. The commander of the San Carlos, Don Miguel Manrique, went mad, carrying and brandishing six loaded pistols under the delusion that he was being pursued, and therefore had to be set ashore. This occasioned a shifting of commands, Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Cuadra going aboard the Sonora, and Juan Manuel de Ayala becoming captain of the San Carlos.

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The passage of the San Carlos up the California coast, delayed by calms, proved to be a laborious one. It was marred by the accidental wounding of Captain Ayala while the loaded pistols left behind by the insane Manrique were being removed from his cabin. Ayala, therefore, had to carry out his subsequent explorations of San Francisco Bay through his subordinates, José Cañizares and Juan Bautista Aguirre.[11]

On June 26, 1775, Monterey Bay was reached. There a month was spent in unloading the cargo, repairing the ship, and building a cayuco from a redwood tree to serve as a launch for the larger vessel. The voyage northward was continued on July 26, and eight days later the San Carlos was off the Golden Gate. Early on August 5, the pilot, José Cañizares, with ten men, was sent in the launch to enter the narrow gateway and to seek for an anchorage, while the larger vessel outside awaited his report. The small launch entered but could not return because of the wind and current, and therefore Captain Ayala decided to seek an anchorage within the port itself. From the log of the San Carlos we

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On June 25, 1775, Monterey Bay was reached. There a month was spent in unloading the cargo, repairing the ship, and building a <u>canoa</u> from a redwood tree to serve as a launch for the larger vessel. The voyage northward was continued on July 26, and eight days later the <u>San Carlos</u> was off the Golden Gate. Early on August 5, the pilot, Jose Canizares, with ten men, was sent in the launch to enter the narrow gateway and to seek for an anchorage, while the larger vessel outside awaited his report. The small launch entered but could not return because of the wind and current, and therefore Captain Ayala decided to seek an anchorage within the port itself. From the log of the <u>San Carlos</u> we

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1. Chapman, <u>A History of California, the Spanish Period</u>, 279.

have an exact description of how the first sea-going vessel entered the Golden Gate:[12]

> The current was so great at the mouth of this port that at 8:30 P. M., with a strong wind from the west-southwest with full sails, the current allowed them to go no more than a mile and a half per hour, which shows that the current must go at least six miles at the middle of the channel. The swiftness of the current, the fact that the launch had not returned and that night was coming on, made it necessary to seek for an anchorage; this was done with great care and precaution; as the force of the wind made it necessary to have full sail, it was feared that some of the rigging might give way. For that reason, soundings were taken continually with a 20 lb. lead, and a line of sixty brazas could not reach bottom either in the channel or near the point. This seemed very strange until it was realized that the current was carrying the lead and it did not strike bottom. They continued thus until they were one league inside the mouth of the bay and a quarter of a mile from shore, when the wind suddenly stopped. Finding that the current was carrying the ship towards the mouth, an anchor was thrown overboard, after having made it fast to the big mast so that if it did not catch the bottom it would not be lost. It was found that the anchor held. Two more anchors were made ready to drop in case the big one should drag. When the wind stopped and the current ceased the vessel was found to be in twenty-two brazas, with sandy bottom.

Thus Cañizares and Ayala shared the distinction of having been the first white men to pass through the Golden

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12. Molera, The log of the San Carlos, 55-56.

Gate. It is difficult to say what the precise anchorage of the San Carlos was, but there is every likelihood that it was near the present North Beach.[13]

On the following day, August 6, while the wounded Ayala kept to his bed, the men of the San Carlos, under the leadership of José Cañizares and Juan Bautista Aguirre, began a series of notable explorations within San Francisco Bay which lasted until September 7. Angel Island, to which they gave the name it retains, Nuestra Senora de Los Angeles, became their base of operations because it was found to possess a sheltered anchorage, wood and water. From there an eight-day exploration into San Pablo and Suisun bays was made by launch. The whole northern half of San Francisco Bay, its inlets, shallows, rocks, and islands, were carefully examined, and the mouth of the San Joaquin River was reached. The southern half of the bay was less carefully reconnoitered. At several places the explorers had contact with the Indians, whom they found exceedingly friendly.[14]

At the close of the forty-four days of exploration, Cañizares submitted a written report and a map of San Francisco Bay to Ayala, and preparations were made for the return

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13. Chapman, A history of California, the Spanish Period, 279; Eldredge, The beginnings of San Francisco, I, 45; Molera, The log of the San Carlos, 56.
14. Molera, The log of the San Carlos, 56-58.

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Thus was completed the first voyage by a seagoing vessel through the Golden Gate into San Francisco Bay, and the first exploration of the bay itself. The work of Ayala, Cañizares, and Aguirre was one of merit, well worthy of remembrance by Californians. Their labors made known to navigation one of the great ports of the world, and prepared the way for its settlement by the Spaniards and for its eventual greatness under American rule.

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15. Eldredge, March of Portolá, 64-68.

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